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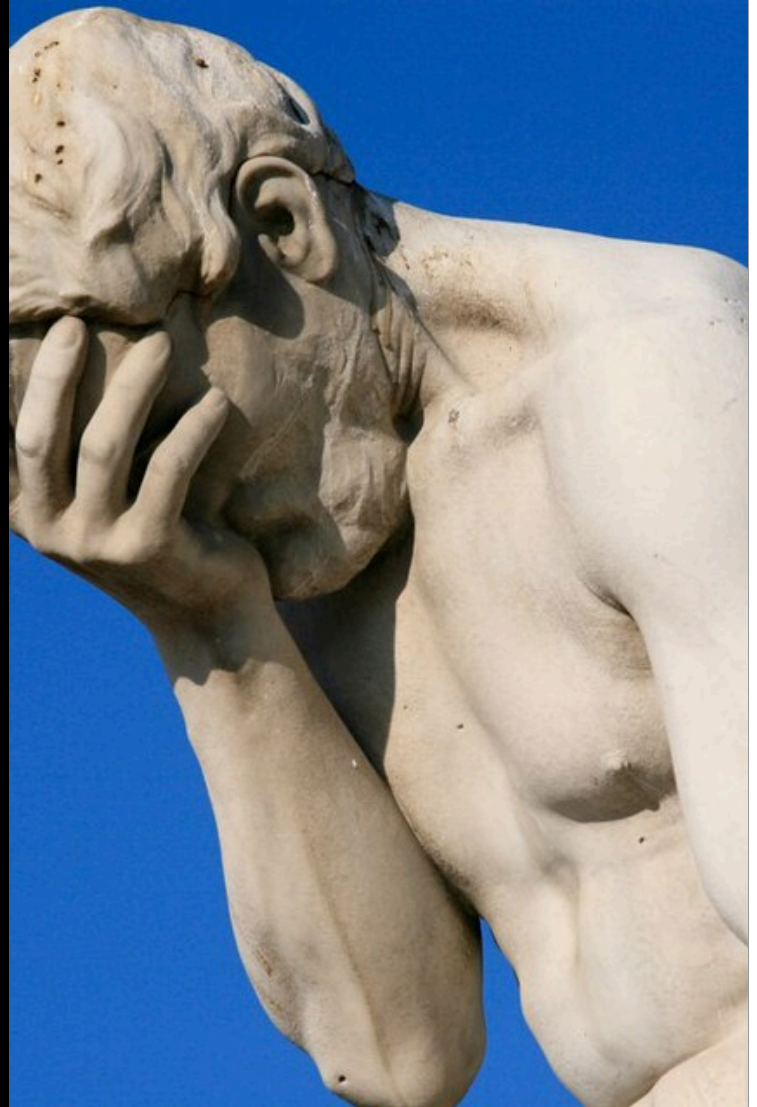


CENSORSHIP / OPINION

Fuck you, Collective Shout, for your assault on the arts that's hurting us all

It is my professional opinion that you,
Melinda Tankard Reist, are a pile of
hateful shit.

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BY MATT · · 11 MINS READ

I never thought I'd use curse words on this website, but this warrants it.

Last week, the puritanical SWERF, TERF, anti-women's autonomy, and anti-LGBT extremist hate group, Collective Shout, was successful in getting Steam to remove hundreds of games that offended its members. It achieved that by putting pressure on payment processors, VISA, Mastercard, and PayPal to force Valve, on threat of losing access to payment processing, to comply with their "moral" values. Again, the morals of a hate

WISHLIST OUR VISUAL NOVEL, THE
LAST WALTZ, ON STEAM!

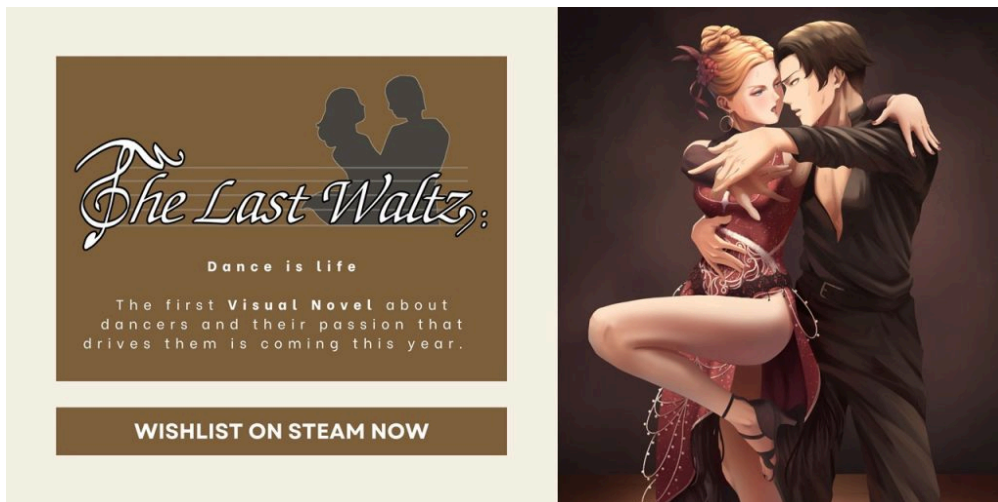
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group. This week, the extremist hate group, Collective Shout, has been even more successful as they've managed to nuke all adult games off Itch.io.

For those who have never visited, Itch.io is like Steam, but for the tiniest indie developers. The platform is a true gallery of the unfinished, experimental, artful and expression of personal creativity, and it was beloved by developers, including those that produced NSFW, adult games, precisely because it was an open platform for creativity.

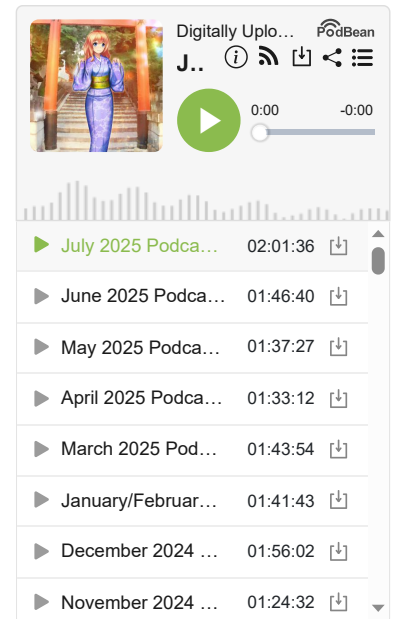
Which is why Itch.io's response to the puritanical hate mob, wielding Visa and Mastercard as their pitchforks, has been so unnerving. Immediately, quite literally overnight, all adult games were removed from searches and are no longer findable. Many of the developers of these games found their titles removed (as in, deleted entirely), and their payments locked, meaning that they won't even be getting the money from sales prior to Itch.io's sudden policy change. Sales that were made when the games weren't in violation of any policy.

Here's Itch.io's [statement on the matter](#). To be clear about it, this is categorically not their fault. They moved in haste, and things are broken, but then they had to move in haste. It's not like VISA or Mastercard were giving them a window of 30 days to wind the adult games support down. The Itch.io team quite clearly wants to support the vast majority of these games and, short of outright illegal stuff, they've been far more open to it than Valve has been over the years. Itch.io is the good guy.



But that's also why this is so terrible, because, to those developers, this was one of the few platforms that they could rely on. You weren't going to make a living from Itch.io, but you could build up a following and, most importantly, get your creativity out there, which is, for the most part, all many of these developers wanted to achieve. Subsequently, genuine, bona fide artists have been hurt by this, and the totality of the NSFW nuking is particularly chilling.

To be clear, NSFW games will come back to Itch.io. Itch.io is only temporarily locking things down like this so it can restructure its policies and review processes to appease the payment processors. However, the damage has been done. It is abundantly clear that anyone developing games with adult material is now skating on very thin ice, with a braying hate mob actively throwing flaming torches directly at the ice to melt it faster. When you can't be sure you'll be able to release a game, much less have it available for as long as you'd like for it to be, you also, generally, won't make the game. Making games



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costs both effort and money and, shockingly, if no one will sell the final product, that effort and money is thrown down the toilet.

I, myself, am an example of how Collective Shout is successfully silencing creativity. I am now going to have to rewrite a couple of sections of *The Last Waltz*. It is by no means a pornographic game. Nor is it even explicit. Compared to the films in [The 50 Greatest Sexual Movies](#) or the writing in the [28 Most Erotic Books You Will Ever Read](#), *The Last Waltz* is not even in the ballpark. None of the “action” is even visualised. But it is a story that covers a 20-year career of a dancer and, amazingly enough, most people do have sex in their adult years. In fact, sex is pretty important to a person’s health and well-being, and a person’s sexual experiences can be part of the foundation of who they are. For entirely artistic reasons, it would be absolutely stupid and shallow of me to IGNORE that. I have spent three years agonising over every word in this thing to make sure that every word in it is there for a specific reason.



And yet now I’m going to have to compromise my vision because, no matter how artful, justifiable or low-impact those scenes are, leaving them in could well result in the game getting an NSFW tag on the likes of Itch.io and Steam.

And then the game is at risk by the hateful mob. Even with Valve still allowing adult games and Itch.io planning to open back up to them, after having spent \$100,000 of my own money in developing the game I just cannot risk that.

And to be clear, I am by no means the biggest victim here. I’m a heterosexual white guy plugging away at a game that has a topic and theme that is only going to upset the most extreme puritans on the planet. Spare a thought for the minority groups that are inherently transgressive to people like the braying bigots in Collective Shout. The LGBT community, for example, or ethnic minorities. Or people creating art in response to trauma or as part of grappling with who they are. Or even people who simply want to be challenging. It will never matter how safe for work the games from those developers are. Depicting so much as a kiss, or even just implying a relationship, is enough to trigger their bigotry. We know that, because it happens all the bloody time. Think of all the times these kinds of arseholes have screamed “won’t someone think of the children?” over a totally sexless depiction of people from these communities, such as the time they tried to ban a [wholesome children’s book](#) that just happened to be about gay penguins, with an uplifting message of tolerance and acceptance.

This kind of thing happens all the time, and now, emboldened by the simple fact that they know they can pressure VISA and Mastercard into enforcing their personal vile, cruel and malevolent “morals” on the world, these people aren’t going to stop at the rough edge of adult material on Itch.io, Valve, or anywhere else.

To be clear, this isn’t “censorship” like when Sony or Nintendo has a set of rules for what they’ll allow on their devices. This is a systematic effort to properly and totally censor games from every platform. If we care about creative freedom, what we need, desperately and immediately, is laws that prevent payment processors from imposing moral policies on who can use their platforms to transact over, and that they should not police what people are allowed to spend their money on. If truly illegal things are being bought and sold, then that is a job for the actual police, and sure, they should be able to access transaction data, but it should not be down to these corporations to be the police themselves.

We also desperately need alternatives to the VISA and Mastercard duopoly. Between the two of them, these two American companies account for something like 97% of global payments, and so all retailers on the planet need to protect their relationship with both. You lose VISA and Mastercard, and you go bankrupt. This is a reality that everyone knows. Including VISA and Mastercard. That means that puritanical hate groups like Collective Shout can find a friendly ear, quite easily, in corporations from a nation with a powerful puritan streak of its own, and one that heavily favours the “rights” of corporations over people. It would be good to see a payment processor like JCB go global, or for a European alternative to emerge, to provide a cultural alternative to the way that money is transferred in the digital world.

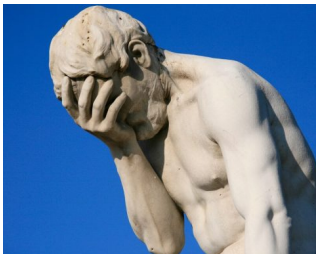
So, in conclusion, *fuck you*, Collective Shout. There aren't enough words to describe just how much I loathe everyone involved in your little hate mob. And my opinion of you, VISA, Mastercard (and let's not forget PayPal while we're here), isn't much better.



CENSORSHIP

COLLECTIVE SHOUT

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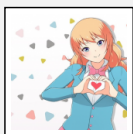
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Do we edit art? Yes. Should we? Hmmm.



MATT

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Matt S. is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of DDNet. He's been writing about games for over 20 years, including a book, but is perhaps best-known for being the high priest of the Church of Hatsune Miku.



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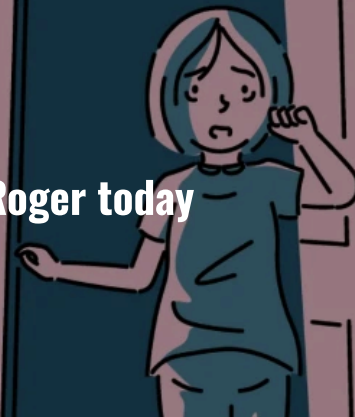
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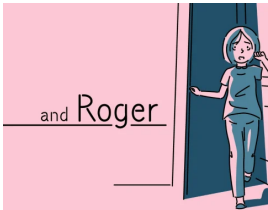
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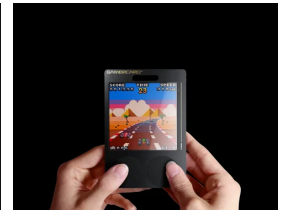
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